

'U' IS NOW IN THE SIXTIES

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That is not intended as an ungrammatical personal ageism remark, but a small reminder that the stamps perfinned and known as issue 'U', were first published back in December 1952 - over 60 years ago! In that austere, post-war era (food rationing was still imposed, for example) a young Princess Elizabeth had unexpectedly come to the throne, and new stamp designs were required to mark her reign. A portrait by Dorothy Wilding Ltd. was chosen as a common theme for them, with various detailed surroundings, and having face values from ½d to 1/6d in small format, and (September 1955) from 2/6 to £1 in larger format and portraying castles. They continued in production until the arrival of the Machin design in June 1967.

During those nearly 15 years, several rapid technical changes evolved which makes the Wilding and Castle's issues fairly complex to differentiate, yet fascinating to collect as stamps. Watermarks change from the Tudor Crown (1952), St. Edward's Crown (1955), to multiple crowns (1958), and eventually without watermarks on a high value set (1968). The introduction of a first and second class postal service needed a two-tier tariff. Experimental mechanisation of letter sorting was done by using graphite bands on the back of stamps (1957), then with the overprinting on the face of them with phosphor bands (1959), and with phosphor bands only (1960).



Mint block of eight, 2½d Wildings with perfin RW/P - R5810.01

Although by now declining in usage, there are many perfins on the Wildings; as an estimate, 8% (or about 2000) of all dies can be found on them, covering the range of varieties and face values. The majority of the designs are unspectacular, coming mainly from J. Sloper & Co. Ltd., although a couple do catch the eye. One is a 68 pin, script *RS* (R4515.01); it's user is unknown, but the die seems to have survived since 1891, and is reported on just one issue 'U'. Another is a monogram of HEAT within a curved hexagon (H2240.01m), again a 70 pin survivor from the 1890's, and used by Jones & Attwood Ltd., Engineers, of Stourbridge, Worcestershire. A few dies had short 'lives' and are reported only on Wildings; R/E/S (R1640.01), used by Remington Electric Shavers Ltd., is such an example. Also some, like PAC (P0120.01b) and B/B^K (B0740.05/a/b) were used just for the large format/high face value stamps.

Perfin users reflect social and economic changes. 1948 had seen, under the Attlee government, the introduction of the National Health Service, and individual Hospital Management Committees were now large users of perfinned Wildings. In the same year, came the nationalisation of the power and rail industries, and many dies of the utility boards for the supply of gas, electricity and water appear on this issue. Administrative changes to what was the old London County Council, in 1965 under the Wilson government, saw the emergence of new London boroughs, and several new perfins were produced for them.

The commemorative stamps issued during this period, with very few exceptions, have all been reported as perfinned too. On a timely note, with Brazil 2014 not long away, this includes the England's World Cup Football Victory stamp of 1966 - but that does seem to be a long time ago!

